

# A Guide for Starting a Successful Neighborhood Association

Each neighborhood is as unique as the residents, businesses, places of worships, and service providers that inhabit them. It's the residents who are best able to create the kind of neighborhood they desire by working together. Coming together with your neighbors only when controversial issues arise limits your effectiveness and the ability of residents to determine the future picture of the neighborhood. Organizing a neighborhood association is an excellent way to improve your neighborhood and develop a spirit of community and pride. Organized neighbors send a message that everyone is working together to build their community.

Keep in mind, there is no one model for starting a neighborhood association. The basic ingredients — issues, people, leadership, planning process, and structure — are necessary components. How they are put together may vary from group to group. This guide serves as a tool to assist you in this challenging, but worthwhile process.

**A neighborhood association is a group of homeowners, renters, apartment dwellers, and representatives from neighborhood businesses, churches, and schools who organize to improve conditions in the neighborhood. When you start a neighborhood association, the people in your neighborhood get a chance to decide what needs to be done and work together to make it happen. A group that represents the community will have the stability, credibility, and political clout to be an effective force for a better neighborhood.**

For more information contact:

Jackie Sudhoff  
Development Programs Administrator  
76 E High St  
Springfield, OH 45502  
937-328-3480  
[jsudhoff@ci.springfield.oh.us](mailto:jsudhoff@ci.springfield.oh.us)

or

Chelsea Jones  
Development Programs Specialist  
76 E High St  
Springfield, OH 45502  
937-324-7372  
[cjones@ci.springfield.oh.us](mailto:cjones@ci.springfield.oh.us)

*Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful,  
committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is  
the only thing that ever has.*

*-Margaret Mead-*

This Neighborhood Association Toolbox is a guide to assist you in starting a neighborhood association. It is by no means a complete set of rules that must be followed. It is merely a starting point with helpful hints and proven methods to effectively organize your group. Organizing a neighborhood association is a big job. The material in this kit breaks down the job into clear steps so that it will be less overwhelming. While it may seem difficult at first, developing your association will be enormously exciting as people come together to address common concerns and learn to work together as a group.

- Block by Block
- Forming a Core Group
- Setting Goals
- Communications
- Effective Meetings
- Giving Public Testimony
- Influencing Decision-Making
- Incorporation and Nonprofit Status
- Volunteers
- Working With Local Government
- Bylaws
- Board of Directors

*Energy and persistence conquer all things.  
-Benjamin Franklin-*

Keep in mind some important guidelines as you begin to organize:

- Building an organization is a process. It can't be done overnight. Be patient. Identify your priorities and build them step-by-step.
- Set realistic goals. Start small and build upward. As your organizational capacity grows, start setting your goals higher.
- How you treat people is crucial to your success. By treating people with respect and honesty, people will be more likely to get involved in the organization.
- Adapt the ideas and strategies outlined in this kit to the specific needs and circumstances of our community and your organization.



*People join neighborhood groups for a variety of reasons. One of them is to get to know their neighbors better and to feel a sense of community. So as you build your organization, be sure to have fun!*

**Coming together is a beginning; keeping together is progress; working together is success.**

**-Henry Ford-**

You cannot organize or reactivate a neighborhood association alone. You will need help. An association may begin informally with just a few people and gradually evolve into an organized group with common interests.

### **Hold an organizing meeting**

Ask several interested people to serve on a steering committee to organize the neighborhood association. In addition to your next-door neighbor, remember to invite church leaders, business owners, and school principals to be a part of the group. Just three or four enthusiastic people can successfully start a neighborhood association.

Host a meeting in someone's home or other comfortable setting. Begin the meeting by asking committee members to respond to a few basic questions. Why do you think we should organize?

- What are the issues that need to be addressed?
- How do you want to improve the neighborhood?
- What are the available resources in the neighborhood?

Next consider boundaries for your neighborhood association and a working name for your group. Once the steering committee has direction and issues to address, it is time to prepare for the first general membership meeting. This is the beginning and core of your neighborhood association. Keep lines of communication open among the core group and effectively communicate the plans, goals, and activities to the neighborhood via newsletter, flyers, e-mail, or a phone tree. Delegate responsibilities to as many

### **Core Group Meetings**

- Define the purpose of the meeting.
- Develop an agenda in cooperation with key participants.
- Choose a location suitable to your group's size. Small rooms with too many people get stuffy and create tension. A larger room is more comfortable and encourages individual expression. If possible, arrange the room so that members face each other, for example, a circle or semi-circle. For large groups, try U-shaped rows.
- Choose an appropriate meeting time. Set a time limit and stick to it, if possible.
- Distribute the agenda and circulate background material, lengthy documents or articles prior to the meeting.
- Remember, members have other commitments. They will be more likely to attend meetings if you make them productive, predictable and as short as possible.
- Use visual aids for interest (posters, diagrams, etc.). Post a large agenda up front to which members can refer. Be sure everyone knows where and when the next meeting will be held.

### **During the Meeting**

- Greet members and make them feel welcome, even late members when appropriate.
- If possible, serve light refreshments; they are good icebreakers and make your members feel special and comfortable.
- Start on time. End on Time.
- Review the agenda and set priorities for the meeting.
- Stick to the agenda.
- Encourage group discussion to get all points of view and ideas. You will have better quality decisions as well as highly motivated members; they will feel that attending meetings is worth their while.
- Encourage feedback. Ideas, activities and commitment to the organization improve when members see their impact on the decision making process.
- Keep conversation focused on the topic. Feel free to ask for only constructive and nonrepetitive comments. Tactfully end discussions when they are getting nowhere or becoming destructive or unproductive.
- Keep minutes of the meeting for future reference in case a question or problem arises.
- As a leader, be a role model by listening, showing interest, appreciation, and confidence in members. Admit mistakes.
- Summarize agreements reached and end the meeting on a unifying or positive note. For example, have members volunteer thoughts of things they feel have been positive during the organizing effort.

### **After the Meeting**

- Write up and distribute minutes within 3 or 4 days. Quick action reinforces importance of meeting and reduces errors or memory.
- Discuss any problems during the meeting with other officers; come up with ways improvements can be made.
- Follow-up on delegation decisions and see that all members understand and carry-out their responsibilities.
- Give recognition and appreciation to excellent and timely progress.
- Put unfinished business on the agenda for the next meeting.
- Conduct a periodic evaluation of the meetings. Note any areas that can be analyzed and improved for more productive meetings.
- Use the above meeting tips for planning and conducting your neighborhood meetings as well. How your association conducts its meeting will attract potential members if done right.
- There are many ways to make meetings productive and efficient. Evaluate what works for your group and make adjustments when it is necessary. Remember, effective meetings will keep them coming back!

*Make no little plans; they have no magic to stir men's blood...  
Make big plans, aim high in hope and work.  
-Daniel H. Burnham-*

One of the best ways to attract attention and form group unity is to focus on an important issue in your neighborhood. Neighbors do not attend meetings or become interested in your association unless you are doing worthwhile projects for their benefit or the benefit of their area. It's important that you determine the needs of your neighborhood and focus on those needs until you demonstrate success. Determine the needs of your neighborhood through meetings and personal discussions with neighbors during a walk-through. After you construct a list of possible needs, discuss them in reasonable depth to identify the issues. When you have identified the issues, discuss each one and agree on the priority of each issue. Sort the issues into short-term or long-term projects and begin to evaluate how your association would like to approach each issue.

In developing your neighborhood projects, focus on a specific issue that will demonstrate action and results and that will be visible in the neighborhood. Get the whole community behind the project by promoting the issue as much as possible. This will provide lots of participation for you to establish a large membership base. If you are successful in achieving your goals or effecting change on a single issue, it demonstrates that your association is an effective group. This establishes the credibility and worthiness of your association, characteristics which are important to long-term survival. Unfortunately, one problem with concentrating on a single issue is that when that problem is solved, everyone leaves. Therefore, it is important to introduce other issues at the same time and get people to work on them in addition to the main issue. As each issue is resolved, focus on new, short- and long-term projects.

In planning projects, keep the ball rolling with a list of projects and activities that will maintain participation and interest. This requires a lot of anticipation and organization by association members. The best approach is to plan around a calendar. Do not suffocate your members with more projects than time will allow. Choose a pace and stay consistent. Slow progress is often better than no progress at all, but keep in mind that one large gap in activity could cost you the participation of a large majority of your membership because of lack of interest. Be careful how you plan and coordinate all projects. Keep people involved in all levels and give people specific jobs (with specific time frames) to do. Everyone is willing to contribute a little bit of time. Do not give too much responsibility to one person when it can be easily delegated to several.

### **Project Ideas**

The following is a list of possible short- and long-term projects:

- Neighborhood Clean-up
- Community Garden, tree planting, flower planting
- Back-to-school party and school supply drive
- Murals or neighborhood art project
- Neighborhood scrapbook or video
- Crime watch program
- Block party or festival
- Neighborhood entrance signs
- Security lighting
- Tool lending libraries
- Tutoring program for youth
- Home tours
- Neighborhood cookout, picnic, or potluck
- National night out celebration
- Holiday celebration
- Neighborhood t-shirts
- Yard of the month award
- Neighborhood newsletter, web site, directory, email tree
- Paint up/fix up projects
- Paint swap
- Speakers on topics of interest to the neighborhood
- Representative to attend city council, school board, and planning commission meetings
- Philanthropic projects, such as “adopting” a family who needs help with Christmas dinner

### **Keeping Interest in the Association**

Once you have tackled a few projects, how do you keep people interested? This by far is the biggest challenge for any neighborhood association. In general, members will participate if following are present:

- Business and social events in which to participate.
- Issues of importance to discuss
- Clean and visible accomplishments
- Organized, competent leaders
- Events to recognize participants



The establishment of a good communications and publicity network is absolutely essential to any group. Whether it is a simple flyer, newspaper announcement advertising a meeting, a short telephone call, or an email, groups must take advantage of all media (including word of mouth) to make people aware of activities.

*Some of the most effective ways to establish a manageable and affordable network is using the following forms of communication:*

## **Flyers**

Any activity, project, or goal of the group can be announced in a flyer. When designing a flyer, be sure the wording is bold enough to be read from a distance of 10 feet. Use colorful paper. If possible, arrange for the use of a church or school copying machine. Or better still, have them quick copied as a donation by a local print shop. Post flyers in markets, Laundromats, schools, beauty shops, and other places frequented by the people you want to reach.

## **Newspaper announcements**

The Springfield News Sun has a Local Focus section, which allows neighborhood associations to advertise their local meetings at no charge.



## **Neighborhood walk-through**

This is one of the most effective ways to begin a relationship with your neighbors and get them interested in your association. Organize a group of at least four to six people to cover a specific region of your neighborhood. Assign pairs to go door-to-door and introduce the association and its goals. Ask them about their concerns and respond with how your association can help them effect a change in their situation. Ask them to attend the next meeting to voice their concerns. Also, ask them to bring some of their neighbors. Be sure to leave a flyer with the information about the next meeting. If no one is home, leave a flyer in a visible, but secure location (do not place flyers in mailboxes as it is against federal law).

## **Surveys**

Surveys are a key way to bring new members into the association. Use a survey when you are just getting started. At your first general meeting, distribute a survey to residents to find out what issues are important to them and what direction they want the group to take. When developing a survey, keep in mind the information you want to get from community residents with these sample questions:

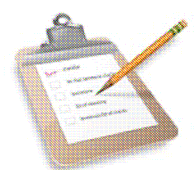
*What are the most important issues in the neighborhood?*

*What are the issues people are willing to work on?*

*What are the best meeting times and locations?*

*What are peoples work schedules?*

*What is the age, racial, and economic make-up of the neighborhood?*





### **Telephone tree/email list**

Individuals who want to contribute but have little time may volunteer to be on a telephone tree or email list. Give each person at least six people to contact by phone with a short message. Or, place a neighborhood member in charge of setting up an email database. Information may then be sent out as the need arises. These are easy ways to establish a communication network that is fast and very effective.

### **Block representatives**

Establish one or two individuals from each side of a street or block to serve as a liaison with your association. They can inform neighbors about what your association is doing and how to get involved. They can also recruit neighbors to support your association and communicate with them by word-of-mouth or telephone. This is a big help when your neighborhood association covers a large area.

### **Newsletters**

A monthly or quarterly newsletter can be an effective tool in communicating with your members. Short, informative articles that are of interest to the entire neighborhood will keep neighbors up-to-date. Newsletters can be paid for through association dues or by advertising dollars and can be produced fairly inexpensively.

A good newsletter might contain the following information:

- Notices of important meeting dates and group events.
- Information about city services
- Recent accomplishments of your group
- Notification of special events
- Recognition of volunteers
- Information about the schools in the neighborhood
- Profiles of neighbors
- Crime/safety information
- Birth/death announcements
- Graduation announcements
- Anniversaries
- A welcome to new neighbors
- Articles of community interest
- Advertising

The newsletter editor will write articles, review articles submitted by others and set deadlines. The newsletter committee should assist with typing, soliciting advertising, and arranging for printing. Decisions will need to be made regarding the title of the newsletter, the number of pages, paper stock, and the arrangement of copy. Consider asking a local printer to donate printing services. Decide how to distribute the newsletter. Newsletters can be sent home with students. Also, consider utilizing Boy or Girl Scout troops or block captains to deliver the newsletters. If you decide to mail the newsletter, call the US Post Office regarding a bulk mail permit.

The way that meetings are run will affect how members become and stay involved in the association. If meetings rarely start on time or are dominated by a few people, members will become frustrated and will stop coming to meetings. When meetings are well run, peoples' opinions are respected, and the agenda is followed, members will feel more willing to participate in other activities of the association.

### **Meeting Arrangements**

The best arrangement for a community meeting is a circle of chairs. People sitting in a circle can communicate better. Tables often form barriers and are easy to hide behind. Avoid using tables unless they are needed for maps or handouts. Choose a neutral room that will just barely accommodate everyone. This will allow the energy of the group to stay within the group and add to your feelings of enthusiasm. Meeting locations could include a neighborhood church or community center, a member's home, or a favorite local restaurant.

### **Agendas**

Every meeting must have an agenda or purpose. Spend time before the meeting deciding not only what to discuss, but also how long and in what order you will discuss the items. It is sometimes useful to put emotional or controversial issues at the end of the agenda. This allows you to take care of small, but necessary decisions early in the meeting. When listing agenda items, it's always good to list a time limit. It's possible that you will go over or under the limit on some items, but will tend to keep the meeting on track. Do not overload the agenda. Try to stay within 1 to 1 and a half hours and allow some time for refreshments and mingling.

### **Running a Meeting**

Start the meeting on time. Do not penalize those on time by making them wait for latecomers. Go ahead and start the meeting with less important agenda items. By doing this, you will reinforce the behavior of those who arrive on time without excluding those who are late. Make sure someone takes the minutes and records the meeting so that those who were unable to attend can still keep up with the activities of the association. If you do not have a secretary, rotate this task.

### **Dealing with Difficult People**

*When a point is being discussed too long:*

- Summarize; or
- Suggest tabling the question for a later time.

*When two members get into a heated discussion:*

- Summarize points made by each and turn the discussion back to the group and/or

- Invite the two to stay after the meeting when the three of you can talk it over.

*When coping with the “one-man” show:*

- Interrupt with a statement giving the speaker credit for his contribution but politely asking him to hold his other points until later and/or
- Interrupt with “You have brought up many points that will keep us busy for a long time. Would anyone like to take up one of these points?”

*When a speaker drifts from the subject:*

- Interrupt, give him credit for his idea but explain that he is departing from the main point; or
- Propose to the group the question of whether it wants to stray from the outline or follow it; or
- Bring the discussion back to the topic by using the related idea as the transition.

*When a member has difficulty expressing his/herself:*

- Build up her confidence by expressing appreciation for what she has said and then rephrase her material with a preface such as “is this what you mean, Ms. Jones?”

### **Participation**

Set realistic expectations about attendance. You may not need large attendance at every meeting. Do not focus on what you consider poor attendance. Concentrate on coming up with techniques to increase attendance. Set a tone at meetings where everyone’s ideas are welcome and respected and no one is put down. Consider establishing a Membership Committee to focus on recruiting new members. Be realistic about what people can do given their other responsibilities. Respect all contributions, no matter how small.

### **Ending the Meeting**

It is surprising how many meetings are allowed to just fizzle out. Meetings should end with a plan of action. Ask committees to research an issue and report back to the group. Summarize what has been decided. Then, decide on the date, time and place of the next meeting before members leave. And, most importantly, in addition to addressing concerns in the neighborhood, plan enjoyable neighborhood activities that will bring the neighborhood together, such as a block party, neighborhood garden, or card club. If those in the neighborhood see the exciting activities happening around them, they will be more likely to want to participate in your neighborhood association.

Giving public testimony before City Councils, boards, or commissions can be frightening if you have never done it before. There are several things you can do to make your thoughts and presentation clear and successful. You may not always have the time to follow the outline listed below. However, whenever you can, it is beneficial to spend as much time as possible preparing your testimony. Carefully prepared testimony may influence action. Also, testimony becomes part of the public record and may be referred to later on.

## ***How to Prepare Public Testimony***

### **Know your time frame**

Find out when, where, and before whom (City Commission, Board of Zoning Appeals, City Planning Board, etc.) the issue will appear. This will let you know how much time you have to prepare--there is a big difference between having one day and one month to prepare.

### **Know your issue**

Support opinions with as many facts as possible. Do your homework: information is power. Read newspapers, magazines, etc., to find out about the issue. Talk to local government officials, when possible, and other citizens. Be knowledgeable of the opposition's arguments and be prepared to counter those arguments. Also, draw on your own knowledge and experience.

### **Start writing down main points**

Construct a rough outline from scattered thoughts, research, plus any additional brainstorming. Begin thinking about any extra visual aids that might be important (posters, charts, fact sheets, flyers, cartoons, brochures, etc.).

### **Know how much time is allowed for the testimony**

There is no posted time limit for testimony at City Commission meetings. However, effective testimony should generally be held to under five minutes. If your ideas are well organized, five minutes should be ample time to make your point effectively.

### **Write a draft statement**

Address the governmental body (example: "Mr./Ms. Mayor, Commissioner"). State your name and address for the record. Say if you are testifying for yourself or a group, and give a brief description of why you or your group is testifying on the issue. Explain how support for your testimony was solicited from your group (by petitions, vote at meeting, surveys, letters, etc.). Bring with you documentation of that support (copies of petitions, surveys, minutes of meetings, etc.) whenever possible. Be specific about how many people were involved in making the decision. State whether this is a majority or minority opinion. Keep the statement as short as possible (two pages is about right). State the problem, the reasons why you or your group support or oppose, and then summarize. Get others to read and make comments on the draft. If you need the approval of a group, use the rough draft so people will feel

comfortable making corrections or suggestions on the copy. Let the statement sit for a day or so, if you have the time, and then go back and read it again and revise if necessary.

### **Write up final copy**

Type and double-space the final copy, if possible (easier to read, looks neater, etc.). Be careful to check spelling. Start anticipating questions from the Council, board, etc. Practice giving testimony before friends and get hints on improving the presentation.

## ***How to Give the Testimony***

### **Be Familiar with the Group's Process**

Attend one or more meetings of the group before you testify to get an idea of the room layout and the procedures used.

### **Know Your Audience**

Try to stress what you have in common with and that you respect the differences of the people you are talking to. The more you can find out about their biases and sympathies, the more chance you have to relate to them.

### **Presenting Yourself**

Be aware of how you present yourself when you make a statement to the decision-making body. Think about what image you want to project. Most of what we communicate is nonverbal. Be aware of your body language.

### **Check Your Feelings**

Try to keep your feelings in check while you are testifying. It is all right to have strong feelings on the subject, but you do not want them to overshadow the content and reason of your message.

### **Maintain Eye Contact**

Use notes rather than written manuscript so you can develop good eye contact.

### **Define What You Want**

Make it perfectly clear what action you want the group to take.

### **Sum up Important Points**

Summarize your written message to emphasize the important points.

### **Copies of Testimony**

Provide copies of your written testimony for each member of the body, appropriate staff, and the media.

#### ***•If you are testifying for a group:***

Make sure different people cover different topics so the testimony is not repetitious.



## Action Check List

- Learn the decision-making process.
- Meet your elected officials as early as possible.
- Let your elected officials know about you.
- Concentrate and coordinate your efforts.
- Inform yourself--research the issue.
- Inform the members and the public of the issues.
- Attend meetings.
- Assist your elected officials.
- Know and support your allies.
- Always provide completely accurate information to elected officials; never deliberately provide misleading or false information.
- Focus on the preliminary stages of policy making.
- Never threaten elected officials.
- Form coalitions.
- Identify “swing votes.”
- Be discreet.
- Be realistic. You may not win every fight, and at times, compromises will have to be made.
- Thank elected officials for their help.
- Inform your members about which officials helped and supported your cause.
- Evaluate your efforts.
- Monitor the implementation of decisions.
- Involve as many members as possible in different roles.

### Tradition

“We always do it this way.” Examine the traditional framework in your community. Does your project fit comfortably? Does it make minor changes? Or is it radically different? A project that differs a great deal from the way “we always do it” will require more explanation to the community before it will be accepted.

### Power Clusters

Organizations and individuals who are all interested in the same thing form power clusters. For example, the Sierra Club, the Audubon Society, and the state Fish and Game Commission might all focus on wildlife issues. When these groups join efforts, they form a power cluster, sometimes called a coalition.

### Established Networks

Networks that may relate to neighborhood associations include the Fayetteville Council of Neighborhoods and other individual neighborhood associations, city committees primarily made up of citizens, and other volunteer organizations with similar interests.

## Steps for Filing Articles of Incorporation

If your neighborhood association plans to apply for nonprofit status, you must first file Articles of Incorporation with the Secretary of State. Here are the steps to consider when incorporating:

- Call the Secretary of State Corporations Division at 888-233-0325 to check on the availability of your corporate name. The state does not allow duplication of corporate names, and your proposed name may already be in use.
- Write your Articles of Incorporation. If possible, have an attorney check your Articles of Incorporation before submitting them to the State.
- The forms must be notarized. All the officers of the corporation must sign two copies of the Articles of Incorporation in front of a Notary Public.

For more information about the incorporation process, visit the Secretary of State's Web site at

<http://www.sosweb.state.ar.us/ofs/info.html>

## Applying for Nonprofit Status

Articles of Incorporation do not make an association a nonprofit organization. Nonprofit status is given by the Internal Revenue Service. The decision to apply for nonprofit or 501(c)3 status with the IRS is a big step for a neighborhood association and should be considered carefully. Applying for and maintaining nonprofit status requires a great deal of paperwork and record keeping.

*The following are benefits of nonprofit status:*

Enables your neighborhood association to accept tax-deductible donations.

Allows you to avoid paying sales tax on your purchases.

Allows you to avoid paying income tax on interest earned in the association's bank account and on qualified non-profit income.

*A neighborhood association is eligible for nonprofit status if:*

It is incorporated by the state as a non-profit corporation.

It is organized solely for charitable purposes.

To apply for non-profit status, you must file IRS Form 1023 seeking tax-exempt status and charitable organization status. IRS Publication 557 explains how to complete Form 1023. The IRS requires the submittal of a filing fee along with Form 1023. To determine the appropriate filing fee for your organization, complete Form 8718 User Fee for Exempt Organization Determination Letter Request. Many organizations find that professional assistance in filing these forms is necessary.



# Volunteers

Recruit people to events and activities - not to business meetings. Sign-in sheets, nametags, and follow-up recruitment calls should be standard procedure in your organization. Give new members a chance to participate through activities such as passing out information at meetings, working on a neighborhood project, delivering the newsletter, stuffing envelopes, or contacting their friends to come to the next event. These activities should make the volunteer feel useful and productive. When recruiting to an activity, try to consider the volunteers' needs. Try to provide childcare, transportation, or a mentor if the volunteer needs it.

When recruiting volunteers, enthusiasm is important. Show confidence by knowing what you would like the volunteer to do and be enthusiastic about the task at hand. Practice explaining your request in a concise, up-beat fashion. In just a few sentences, you should be able to convey the essence of the organization, the purpose of the task, and how the task will enhance the organization and the neighborhood.

## *Here are six steps to successful volunteer recruitment:*

### **1. Be prepared**

Have in mind a mini-strategy consisting of how you will explain your goal and what you want the person to do. Review what you know about the person, such as interests, experience, and family. Look and listen for clues as to what interests this person.

### **2. Legitimize yourself**

You need to gain quick credibility. Find a common background or a mutual friend. Explain that you have the same problem that they do. Mention people that they might know. Explain why the person's participation will make a difference.

### **3. Listen, Listen, Listen**

Draw people out. Listening is more important than just not talking. It is asking good questions, providing encouraging remarks, and using body language that says you are interested. Be sure to listen to for special skills, useful contacts, and organizational networks that can be useful to your organization.

### **4. Challenge**

Encourage people to produce change. Challenge people to care about the organizations goals.

### **5. Get a commitment**

Never leave a conversation open-ended. Get a commitment with a firm deadline. Write it down, make a note for follow-up and clarify exactly what should happen next.

### **6. Follow-up**

There is nothing worse than making a big fuss over people while recruiting them and then ignoring them once they show up. Have greeters or a welcoming committee at meetings, introduce new people to experienced volunteers, and keep the lines of communication between you and your volunteers open at all times.

Keeping volunteers is just as important as recruiting them. Recruitment has to be backed up by an organizational plan with clear goals and expectations of what volunteers will do. Have a committee or program designed especially for volunteer and membership issues. This program should include training, supervision, recognition, and leadership development. Always explain the organizational importance of each task and assign tasks to fit the time that the volunteer is able to give. Recognize volunteers and make them feel a part of the team.

Recruiting and keeping volunteers is something that is learned through practice and experience. Have fact sheets for each recruiter addressing such things as how to overcome objections to volunteering, the purpose of the task they are recruiting for, organizational information, and a brief description of the task. Growing, thriving organizations must train leaders on how to recruit others and build recruitment strategies into their on-going program work.



Since a large part of a neighborhood association's time may be spent advocating for change at the local level, it is important to know how to work with local government. The next few sections give ideas for how groups like neighborhood associations can effectively work with local government to influence decision-making. These sections deal with general principles, such as how to choose the best channel to go through, how to give public testimony, and how to be politically effective as a group. Many of these topics are discussed and additional resources are available by becoming a member of the [Springfield Council of Neighborhood Associations](#).

### **Set Your Goals**

What is most important for your neighborhood association to accomplish in order to maintain livability? If you have a neighborhood plan, some goals have likely been set. If not, set aside some time for your Board to set its direction. Prepare needs statements for the City budget process and prioritize issues for Board involvement.

### **Know Your Issues**

Do your homework. Find out who is affected, to what degree, and the consequences of no action. On a long-range issue, document your process, dates of events, who was involved, and correspondence. Determine which issues will need to be addressed by a local government agency and which will need to be addressed by the neighborhood itself. Only neighbors working together and along with government can solve short- and long-term neighborhood problems.

### **Know the Structure and Purpose of City Government**

Contact the [City Clerks Office at 324-7341](#) or access the website for information regarding City of Springfield Departments and structure.

### **Become Acquainted with Procedure**

Visit a few meetings of your public officials (e.g., City Council, boards, commissions, etc.). Understand how they operate, discover the guidelines they have to follow, and realize the pressures they are under. Have someone explain to you the procedure if it isn't otherwise clear.

### **Work Personally**

Allow your officials to get to know you. The best form of contact is on the personal level: (1) personal appearance, (2) phone call, (3) letter, (4) e-mail. See [www.ci.springfield.oh.us](http://www.ci.springfield.oh.us) on ways to contact city officials.

### **Keep Your Public Officials Informed**

Do not surprise your officials with unexpected actions. Bring written copies of your concern when meeting with them, and follow up your concern and action with letters. (Keep copies of everything you do!) Make reference to things you have sent. Keep up an ongoing relationship. Show your appreciation as well as dissatisfaction. Send carbon copies to other individuals or agencies involved (citizens, City staff, others).

### **Work on all Levels**

Try the chain of command first by going to the person most directly responsible for your concern. Then work on all levels by going to your appointed and elected officials. If you don't know whom to talk to, do not hesitate to go to the top. Be sure to keep your City Councilors informed. If necessary, address the Council as a whole to be sure you are heard.

### **Make it Clear if You Represent a Group**

Identify the name of your group and its purpose. Use appointed contact persons to establish continuity and identity. Document attendance at general meetings and votes taken. Ensure that you have the group's approval/authorization before acting.

### **Get Solid Answers**

Don't be satisfied with vague answers. Talk to informed people and solicit answers you can rely on. Ask for and remind your officials of specific information--dates, places, times, etc.

### **Be Open to Suggestions**

Take the suggestions of your officials seriously and follow up on them. Progress occurs when everyone pushes in the same direction.

### **Follow Up**

Follow up on a discussion with a memo summarizing the discussion and its outcome. Check back to see if whatever has been agreed to is being done or to see if decisions are being made. After the decision has been made, check back with the appropriate staff or government official to be certain it is carried out.

### **Keep the Neighborhood Informed**

Use your neighborhood association's meetings and annual newsletter to keep the neighborhood informed. Talk with neighbors and businesses about what is happening. Contact the neighbors and friends about what is happening. Contact the newspapers to let them know your concerns. You may wish to issue a press release. Make your written information interesting.

### **Springfield Council of Neighborhood Associations**

The mission of the Springfield Council of Neighborhood Associations (CONA) is to collectively work toward self-reliance, to improve the quality of life in the neighborhood or the City of Springfield, and to help organize other areas of the community into neighborhood associations. Additionally, council members have the opportunity to learn from one another by sharing neighborhood problems as well as solutions.

CONA is made up of 7 elected officers, which make up the Executive Committee. No two elected officers can be from the same neighborhood association. Meetings are held the fourth Monday of the Month (excluding July and December) at 7:00PM in the City Hall Forum at 76 E High St. Contact Chelsea Jones (324-7372) for more information.



Bylaws provide an overall framework for your organization and outline general rules that govern the day-to-day operation of the group. They should state the organization's purpose, mission, and structure. In writing bylaws, use language that everyone can understand. Remember, bylaws are just an instruction manual for your group.

The following is an outline for writing bylaws.

*Article 1-Name of the Organization*

State name of the organization clearly.

*Article 2-Purpose of the Organization*

State specific/primary focus of the group

- Who you will serve
- What is your function (preservation, education, advocacy, safety)

*Article 3-Membership*

Define classes of membership

- Voting members
- Non-voting members

Define membership

- Attendance and Dues

Define voting members

- Who can vote

*Article 4-Regular Membership Meeting*

1. When will regular meetings be held
2. When will officers be elected
3. When will treasurer report of financial condition
4. When can special meetings be called
5. How will meetings be publicized
6. Define quorum (How many people will it take for an action to pass; percent of voting members)

*Article 5-Executive Board*

1. Define powers of the board
2. Define number and titles of the board
3. Define how the board will be elected
4. Define terms of office
5. Resignation
6. Vacancy
7. Suspension or removal

*Article 6-Board Meetings*

1. Who will run board meetings
2. When will the board meet
3. What constitutes a quorum of the board

4. Can the board take action without meeting

#### *Article 7-Officers*

1. List offices to be filled
2. How will officers be selected and how long will they serve
3. Define responsibilities of the chair
4. Define responsibilities of the vice chair
5. Define responsibilities of the treasurer
6. Define responsibilities of the secretary
7. List which officers serve on the executive committee

#### *Article 8-Committees*

1. List standing/permanent committees
2. Who can serve on committees
3. How are committees formed
4. What are the powers of committees
5. When will committee meet

#### *Article 9-Records and Reports*

1. What records will be kept permanently and who will keep them
2. How will members be kept track of

#### *Article 10-Fiscal Year*

1. When does fiscal year begin and end

#### *Article 11-Contracts, Checks, and Deposits*

1. Execution of Contracts
  - Who can sign them
2. Checks
  - Who can write them, how are they approved
3. Deposits
  - When and where will funds be deposited
  - Who will deposit them

#### *Article 12-Changes to Bylaws*

1. When will they be reviewed
2. Who can change them
3. How will changes be communicated

## *Chairperson*

- Serves as chairperson of the executive board.
- Oversees the schedule of meeting and activities
- Coordinates the activities of officers, leaders, and committees
- Appoints committees as needed
- Arranges for a regular meeting time and place each month
- Develops a meeting agenda
- Contacts each person who has a part during the meeting to remind him/her to be prepared
- Arrives at least 30 minutes before the meeting to set up the room

## *Vice-Chairperson*

- Assists the chairperson
- Presides at meetings and performs duties in the absence of the chair
- Arrives at least 30 minutes before the meeting to set up the room
- Responsible for introducing new members and guests at meetings

## *Secretary*

- Keeps complete and accurate minutes of all meetings
- Reads correspondence to group
- Writes letters for the association
- Contact members who have missed several meetings and extend an invitation for them to attend the next meeting

## *Taking Minutes*

It is a good practice to keep minutes of meetings that describe what happened and the decisions made. It provides a written record and helps people stay informed and on track. Minutes need not be in any particular form, but should be clear about any decision made, list who was present and, if requested, state the name of anyone opposed to the decision made. Minutes should be signed by the secretary of the meeting and accepted by the board at the next meeting. Minutes can be accepted as read or as written. Any additions or corrections should also be noted and added to the minutes. Minutes should be available to those who miss a meeting.

## *Treasurer*

- Keeps accurate records of all receipts and expenditures of association funds
- Plans a budget and presents to the association for approval
- Pays bills as approved by the association
- Gives a financial report at each meeting or as required by the chairperson
- Prepares a financial report for the year and presents it to the association
- Provides written financial reports for the Secretary to include with the minutes



## **Neighborhood Resources**

### ***City Boards and Commissions***

Residents who would like to serve their city are encouraged to apply for a volunteer position on one of the many boards, commissions and committees. Board and commission members advise the City Council on a variety of issues and play a significant role in maintaining interaction between residents and city government. Contact the City Clerk of Commission's Office at (937) 324-7341 for more information.

### ***City Website***

Residents can access information by visiting the City's website at [www.ci.springfield.oh.us](http://www.ci.springfield.oh.us). Information about all city departments and services, meeting dates and times, and online documents and forms are available on the site.

### ***Community Development***

The City of Springfield administers funds from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development for rehabilitating and revitalizing neighborhoods. Federal monies received include the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG), Emergency Solutions Grant and HOME Investment Partnership. For more information, call (937) 324-7380.

### ***Springfield Government Access Television***

Provides live and taped coverage of government meetings along with news items of community interest. Call (937) 324-7341 for more information.

### ***Clark County Solid Waste District***

Clark County Solid Waste District is dedicated to assisting groups and individuals in cleaning up the Springfield and Clark County area. Many opportunities exist for both groups and individuals to participate in various clean-up efforts. Education and outreach concerning waste reduction and recycling is also a focus. For more information call (937) 521-2020 or visit [www.32trash.org](http://www.32trash.org).

### ***City of Springfield Reserve a Roll-off Program***

The City of Springfield operates a neighborhood clean-up program through the Community Development Department. This program places large commercial dumpsters into neighborhoods for a one-day clean up. It is up to the neighborhood to provide volunteers for the clean up as well as to provide notification to the surrounding neighborhood.